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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the Alabama Learning Resource Center is to keep special education personnel aware of current developments in instructional materials, media, and technology. A separate questionnaire was developed and circulated to each of three groups: special education teachers, university chairmen of special education programs, and coordinators of special education. The questionnaires used are not presented. However, teacher responses included: the names of the most used instructional materials by commercial name and by academic areas, their source of information for these materials, and the frequency of personal use of the Alabama Learning Resource Center. University chairmen responses included: the adequacy of methods courses to acquaint students with commercial aids, the geographic inaccessibility of learning centers for most students, and the frequent use of the Alabama Learning Resource Center as a major source of audiovisual aids. Coordinators of special education responses included: the need for learning center availability, the adequacy of instructional materials within a center, and the suggested percentage of budget that should be allocated to certain instructional materials. It was included that more services need to be offered to teachers, including equipment and materials training. It was also suggested that funding priorities be divided away from a centralized learning center and toward increasing accessibility to materials. (DAG)

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THE ALABAMA LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER - SOME PERSPECTIVES

by

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THE ALABAMA LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER - SOME PERSPECTIVES

As a result of Bureau of Education for the Handicapped priorities, the need for providing a complete spectrum of educational services to all exceptional children has become readily apparent. In recent years, the establishment of regional and state learning resource centers (LRC's) has been receiving increased visibility.

In 1972, the Alabama Learning Resource Center became a viable component of the Southeastern Learning Resource Center (Region 13). The State Center was initially established in Montgomery as an extension of the Alabama State Department of Education, Program for Exceptional Children and Youth, and has since expanded to include two associate centers in the Homewood City Board of Education and Mobile/Baldwin County areas, respectively.

The primary purpose of the Alabama Learning Resource Center continues to be that of keeping special education personnel abreast of current developments in instructional materials, media, and technology, through a constantly improving program of in-service education.

METHODOLOGY

For purposes of determining the extent to which the Alabama Learning Resource Center is meeting its objectives and to ascertain future directions, in May of 1976 questionnaires were developed and mailed to three respective consumer groups in Alabama: (1) special education teachers, (2) university chairmen of special education programs, and (3) coordinators of special education. A specific questionnaire for each

group was utilized to receive insights from the unique interests and perspectives of each.

Although there are one hundred twenty-seven local education agencies in Alabama, only eighty-seven separate and distinct coordinators of special education could be determined. (In some instances cooperative agreements among local education agencies provide joint employment for specific coordinators.) Each coordinator was mailed a questionnaire by the Center which resulted in a return of seventy-eight percent (68 of 87). Seventy-four teachers were selected from the state roster by stratified random sampling and fifty-four percent (40 of 74) responded. Each of the university chairmen with training programs in special education was also sent a questionnaire which resulted in seventy-one percent (10 of 14) responding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Because each consumer group perceives the Alabama Learning Resource Center from a unique perspective, results from the respective questionnaires have been tabulated and discussed separately. Totals do not always reflect the exact number of questionnaires received due to the failure of some respondents to appropriately answer specific questions.

Teachers

Teachers were requested to name three instructional materials by commercial name that they used most frequently to teach specific academic areas. Although responses were sometimes vague or ambiguous, forty distinct companies were identified in reading, twenty-six in arithmetic, twenty-three in social studies, and fourteen in vocational education. Stanwix House was named most frequently in reading with nine responses,

while Continental Press led in arithmetic with seven. No company was named over three times in social studies or vocational education.

The diversity of responses tends to indicate that no commercial company is dominating the market. Reading probably receives the greatest amount of emphasis, both by the teachers and the companies, due to its visibility and priority for funding at the state and federal levels. The paucity of materials utilized in vocational education may be due to one or more of the following factors: (1) more elementary units are in existence; therefore, probably more were selected in the sampling, (2) lack of emphasis on career education, and (3) less vocational materials available on the market.

When the teachers were asked how they were exposed to the majority of materials they are presently using, eighteen selected "catalogues", while twelve named "other teachers". College and in-service training followed with seven and six responses, respectively. The "coordinator of special education" was in last place with four responses.

Sixty percent (24) of the respondents said that audio-visual aids were available in the quantity and quality they desired. Eighty-eight percent (35) would like to attend a workshop designed to familiarize them with an assortment of commercial materials. The time of the year that would be desirable for such a workshop was the fall (14 responses), followed by summer (9), spring (7), and winter (0).

Sixty-nine percent (27) replied that they had never utilized services available through the Alabama Learning Resource Center. Eighteen percent (7) utilized the Center "1-5 times", followed by five percent who selected "5-10 times". Of those who had utilized the Center, seventy-one percent (10 of 14) replied they were satisfied with the quality of services.

Thirty-seven percent (12 of 32) replied that the Alabama Learning Resource Center does an adequate job of making teachers aware of their services.

The need for the Alabama Learning Resource Center to expand its services to become more accessible to teachers was apparent as was the need to provide the Center with more visibility. The expansion and development of associate centers in various geographical regions of the state might aid in alleviating the problem.

University Chairmen

Of the university chairmen who responded sixty percent (6 of 10) believed that their methods courses adequately exposed their students to available commercial aids. This lack of exposure to commercial materials was reflected by three respondents forwarding (as requested in the survey) a list of commercial materials available on their respective campuses. A comparable list of commercial assessment instruments was available on half of the campuses. If associate learning centers were established on a geographical basis in closer proximity to campuses, students might increase the degree of pre-service familiarity with commercial materials that was consistently found to be deficient in the survey.

Six of the ten respondents replied that films and other audio-visual aids were "frequently" or "widely" used, while four checked "seldom" or "occasionally". The Alabama Learning Resource Center was listed as the major source of audio-visual aids (4), followed by "mail order" (2), and "library" (2).

Films and other audio-visual aids have proven to be highly successful lending commodities due to the relatively high purchase expense that would

be incurred by qualified groups. In addition, repair service is available through the Center without charge to the consumer.

Five of eight respondents indicated that associate centers should be located on college campuses. Nine of ten believed that the emphasis of the Alabama Learning Resource Center should be on both pre-service and in-service training. Six of ten indicated that pre-service and in-service should receive equal priority, while four gave the advantage to in-service. Six of ten also stated that their faculty was not adequately aware of the goals and purposes of the Alabama Learning Resource Center.

When asked how they perceived the role of the Alabama Learning Resource Center, the following responses were received: (not necessarily in order of priority)

1. Make materials accessible to appropriate persons
2. Update and revise State Curriculum Guides
3. Establish regional geographical centers - either in local education agencies or on university campuses*
4. Conduct regional and local in-service programs on commercial and teacher-made materials
5. Publish Center catalogues, with wide dissemination
6. Increase publicity pursuant to Center services by:
   a. Advertising in the Alabama School Journal
   b. Publishing a monthly newsletter
   c. Sponsoring information booths at various state and local meetings
   d. Produce a videotape of the Center and its services for educational television, with dissemination to local education agencies and to university training programs
7. Provide mobile units for increased service to rural areas
8. Establish prescriptive materials' lists matched to problem descriptors
9. Make materials more accessible by paying return postage
10. Continue to update and maintain current inventory, with several materials of each type
11. Produce videotapes of teachers using various commercial and teacher-made materials

*Sites for associate centers could be selected on the basis of what the local education agencies or university training programs have to offer as a complement to learning resource center services and resources.

Coordinators of Special Education

Ninety-seven percent (60 of 62) of the persons responsible for

supervision of the special education program believed that the availability of an associate learning resource center would be helpful to their teachers. Ninety-eight percent (63 of 64) would like to have local workshops conducted by the Alabama Learning Resource Center to familiarize teachers with current commercial materials. Ninety-seven percent (66 of 68) indicated a willingness to recommend that such workshops be part of their in-service training programs. Sixty-three percent (43 of 68) selected fall as the most appropriate time for a workshop followed by summer with fifteen percent (10 of 68), winter with twelve percent (8 of 68), and spring with seven percent (5 of 68). On a priority scale as to which professional group would make the best consultants for materials workshops, teachers (171 points) and State Department of Education personnel (170 points) easily outdistanced special education coordinators (136 points) and university personnel (110 points).

When asked if special education teachers in their local education agencies had an adequate supply of instructional materials, fifty-one percent (34 of 67) replied in the affirmative. Ninety-one percent (58 of 64) stated that their teachers had the necessary competency to adequately utilize the materials that were available. Ninety-two percent (59 of 64) indicated that less than one half of the materials in their respective local education agency was teacher-made.

Pursuant to budgeting for instructional materials, coordinators were asked to list the percentage of the budget that should be allocated to specific areas. The average results were as follows (in order of priority):

22%	Hardware	16	Educational Games
19	Texts	12	General Supplies
18	Workbooks	11	Films
		98%	Total

The sum total of the percentages does not equal 100 percent due to rounded-off subtotals.

When asked where associate centers should be located, sixty-four percent (43 of 67) selected local education agencies, thirty-four percent (23 of 67) named both local education agencies and university training programs, and two percent (2 of 67) thought centers should be located exclusively in universities. Ninety-one percent (60 of 66) indicated that the emphasis of the Alabama Learning Resource Center should be one of pre-service and in-service with forty-two percent (27 of 65) indicating that they should be given equal priority. Forty-three percent (28 of 65) selected in-service as the greatest area of need, while only fifteen percent (10 of 65) named pre-service.

When asked how they perceived the role of the Alabama Learning Resource Center, the coordinators' responses closely paralled the responses of the university chairmen. Additional answers included: (not necessarily in order of priority)

1. Need for quicker deliveries and check-out time
2. Sponsor workshops pursuant to state adopted texts
3. Encourage release time to teachers to visit the Center
4. Open Center at night to encourage increased usage
5. Conduct in-services on writing individualized plans of instruction
6. Divide materials into elementary and secondary sections
7. Seek input from local education agencies before making inventory purchases
8. Provide current lists of commercial companies, with appropriate addresses

SUMMARY

In conclusion, the role of the Alabama Learning Resource Center is an expanding one. The need for additional services to teachers is apparent in the form of associate learning resource centers. Although the traditional leadership role of centralized learning resource centers at the regional and state levels has been recognized, perhaps the necessity of re-examining funding priorities in order to make materials more accessible to the classroom teacher is in order.

Although the Alabama Learning Resource Center has been active as a lending service with seventy percent of its equipment and instructional materials on loan at a given time, serving teachers on a large scale basis from a centralized location has proven to be a difficult responsibility. The role of the Alabama Learning Resource Center may have to further expand to include large scale training of teachers pursuant to the usage of equipment and materials in addition to serving as a lending and preview service. In view of the fact that state allocations are available to the classroom teachers for purchasing instructional materials, teachers will need to become more competent in the selection, utilization, and evaluation of the materials they purchase. Hopefully, they will eventually become less reliant on state lending facilities and more dependent on local associate centers to keep them abreast of developments in the rapidly changing field of commercial media and materials.